

Steve Westly *California State Controller*



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Westly Orders Expedited Payment of “Fire Victim Tax Advance” to California Families

Also establishes fund for prompt payment of federal disaster claims

Sacramento, November 4, 2003 – State Controller Steve Westly today ordered the California Franchise Tax Board to expedite payment of the “Fire Victim Tax Advance” to families affected by the wildfires ravaging southern California. Westly also established a fund for federal disaster claims made by individuals or local governments.

“Thousands of California families have lost their homes, property and, in some cases, their loved ones,” said Westly. “No family’s loss of home or loved one should be compounded by financial hardship.”

The “Fire Victim Tax Advance” is a special state tax benefit that allows wildfire victims to file for a refund related to disaster loss on their 2002 state tax returns even though the wildfires occurred in 2003. Victims can claim disaster loss for the uninsured value of their homes.

By amending last year’s returns, the financial lifeline families so urgently need is provided through an immediate tax rebate, rather than one in mid-2004.

“California families want to rebuild their homes and get on with their lives, not worry about their checking account balance,” added Westly. “We’re taking all possible actions to make sure families have the support they need to get on with their lives.”

Westly is also directing the Franchise Tax Board, which he chairs, to provide immediate assistance to any family seeking information about the “Fire Victim Tax Advance” through the Board’s consumer hotline at 1-800-852-5711. Taxpayers claiming the disaster loss should write, “CA Wildfires” in red ink at the top of the tax return to expedite the refund. If filing electronically, taxpayers should follow the software instructions to enter the disaster information.

Individuals filing federal disaster claims should do so directly through FEMA (www.fema.gov). Local governments and state departments should file FEMA claims through the California Office of Emergency Services (OES). OES will work with local governments and state departments to obtain federal reimbursement for any losses suffered as a result of the disaster. The Controller’s office will make claims from the newly established fund.

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